

INTRODUCTION

Unbinding the Dead: A Decade of Reader Criticism in the Fourth Gospel

"My aim has been to expose the Fourth Gospel's rhetorical power to analysis by studying the literary elements of its 'anatomy.'" Culpepper

"[R]eader-oriented exegeses can often read disappointingly like the familiar critical renditions of the given biblical passage, lightly re clothed in a reader vocabulary." Moore

"In the wider world of literary criticism today, critics and readers are being forced out from behind their masks and asked to own their views as their own. . . ."
Tolbert

"Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'" Jn 11:44

Formalist Reader Criticism and the New Testament

Reader-response criticism has survived as a vaguely defined subfield of literary criticism and literary theory for nearly twenty-five years now. But its impact on biblical criticism has been felt for only about half that long. Instead of being author-centered like so much of earlier literary and biblical criticism had been--instead of answering questions such as, "What is the social/political/biographical context which best explains what this author is trying to do?"--reader-response criticism purports to be audience-centered. It has been interested in questions related to the effect of narrative upon audiences, theories of how texts effect particular responses, and illustrations of how a narrative can be transformed by the psychology of the individual reader or by particular interpretive communities.

When reader-response criticism burst onto the American literary scene in the 1970s, its popularity grew quickly. In contrast to most earlier approaches, reader criticism was keenly interested in describing and analyzing the persuasive side of literature.¹ The new breed of doctoral candidates in the late 1960s had had their mettle tested in protests against the military-industrial complex, the draft, the Vietnam war,

¹Steven Mailloux is especially helpful at situating this historical shift within the context of institutional rhetoric (*Rhetorical Power*, 19-36). Similarly, Robert Holub discusses this shift in emphasis, within the context of an American fixation with the text which was just as easily amenable to French deconstruction and Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological theory of reading as it had been to New Criticism (*Crossing Borders*, 8-13; cf. Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power*, 45).

racism, and sexism, and had seen how rhetoric could harm and heal. They had lived life with passion and zeal and had developed a distrust and distaste for ordered power structures.² Now that they found themselves tenuously seated on the other side of the classroom desk, backs to the chalkboard, audience-oriented criticism was the natural, professional reaction to their mentors' clinical, white-gloved approach to literature. The old "New Critics" who thought they could analyze texts apart from their political, social, ethical, and personal effects were nearly extinct. A new species of reader was crawling out of the oozing slime.³

Somewhat similarly to this development in English departments across the United States, in the late 1970s many battle-tested New Testament professors and raw recruits just finishing their degrees were searching for an antidote to the hardline historical sourcery that had vivisected the biblical text and sucked out its readerly impulse. Having been inaugurated into literary criticism by the precision of structuralist thought, these scholars were soon opening up the rhetorically-oriented works of Wayne Booth, Wolfgang Iser, and the important collections of reader-response articles edited by Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, Jane Tompkins, and others.⁴ The omens for change appeared to be good.

Stephen Moore names this new breed of scholars and dissects their work up through 1988 in his chapter entitled "Stories of Reading: Doing Gospel Criticism as/with a Reader."⁵ And although new names might be added to his list, the reader-oriented critics' approaches to the Bible have not changed much in the intervening years.⁶

In contrast to their English Department colleagues across the hall who believed reader-oriented criticism was a much needed corrective to New Criticism's one-sided, constricting emphasis on "the poem itself," New Testament scholars initially saw the more synchronic, formalist, reader-oriented, narratological approaches as offering a way to hover closely over "the text itself" and breathe new life into it.⁷ Thus, as New

²Linda Hutcheon opines: "In very general terms, the postmodern questioning of this totalizing impulse may well have its roots in some sort of 1960's or late romantic need to privilege free, unconditioned experience" (The Politics of Postmodernism, 63; see also Mailloux, Rhetorical Power, 30-32; and Greenblatt, Learning to Curse, 166-167).

³In writing about literary critics' disenchantment with narratology, Christine Brooke-Rose argues that "the chief problem came to be seen as arising not from inherent universal structures but from *reading*, as if analysers had a profound need to experience, not a text or even a story, but *their own mental processes* when faced with a poetic text or story that perhaps did not give them the immediate and unalloyed pleasures that its renown, its place in the canon or histories of literature had led them to expect" ("Whatever Happened to Narratology?," 284; my emphasis). If one were to take out her reference to "*universal structures*," leaving "structures" by itself, her observation would parallel the earlier reaction of reader-response criticism to New Criticism (cf. Suleiman, "Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," in Suleiman and Crosman, eds., The Reader in the Text, 3-4).

⁴Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction; Iser, The Implied Reader, The Act of Reading; Suleiman and Crosman, The Reader in the Text; Tompkins, Reader-Response Criticism; Eco, The Role of the Reader; Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?; Mailloux, Interpretive Conventions; Culler, On Deconstruction; Holub, Reception Theory; and Freund, The Return of the Reader.

⁵Literary Criticism and the Gospels, 71-107; and more recently, "How Jesus' Risen Body Became a Cadaver," 273-278.

⁶For example, see the more recent assessment of reader-response criticism in The Bible and Culture Collective, The Postmodern Bible, 38-67, 163.

⁷As Stephen Moore puts it so well: "The impression being fostered among biblical students and scholars . . .

Testament scholars began to search for the "real, super, ideal, encoded, implied" reader in, with, and under the biblical text, they seemed to have had a threefold hope. First and foremost, they hoped that the analysis of biblical texts as narratives (complete with narrator, characters, and plot) could draw back together into one loaf the fragmentary crumbs of texts left over after historical-critical methodologies had departed. Texts would be interpreted as unified wholes.⁸ Texts would be seen as "mirrors" and not only as "windows" to the past.⁹ Secondly, these New Testament scholars hoped that the analysis of the creatively affective and persuasive aspects of story worlds could add a third dimension to their mentors' two-dimensional emphasis on historical events and community concerns. Text pragmatics would replace text semantics.¹⁰ And thirdly, the scholars hoped that this new approach could bridge the growing gap between the academician studying the text as artifact and the layperson reading the text as article of faith.¹¹ The Bible would be a book motivating laity and scholars alike by its correctly interpreted persuasive power.

Without a doubt, early appropriations of reader-response criticism in the Fourth Gospel have been firmly rooted in formalist literary theory and rhetorical studies.¹² They have typically argued that markers in the text itself guide and manipulate readers' responses. The role of the reader critic, then, has been to uncover and expose the gospel's rhetorical strategies and to make them obvious to the otherwise unsuspecting reader.¹³ My own dissertation, entitled The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel,¹⁴ fell into this category of reader-response criticism but with some subtle twists. In it I explored the purpose of what I interpreted to be a "reader victimization" strategy in the Fourth Gospel: those places where the narrative forced the reader to the wrong conclusions (like false leads in a detective novel), only to correct the reader's mistakes later on.

But like its older sister in the secular realm, biblical reader-response criticism has watched many of its early adherents fly away from formalist, rhetorical constructions of readers to nest with feminist, deconstructive, and other poststructuralist understandings of

is that secular literary criticism, as it pertains to literary narrative, is a discipline preoccupied with the unity of text and the autonomy of story-worlds . . ." (Literary Criticism and the Gospels, 11; see also 50-55; cf. Fowler, "Let the Reader Understand", 9-12; Powell, What Is Narrative Criticism?, 6-21; Detweiler and Robbins, "From New Criticism to Poststructuralism," 248-252; and Boers, "Narrative Criticism, Historical Criticism, and the Gospel of John," 37-38, 43-44).

⁸See, for example, the unitarian emphasis in Fowler, Loaves and Fishes; Tannehill, The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts; and Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel.

⁹Petersen, Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics, 19. Cf. Moore, "'Mirror, Mirror . . .': Lacanian Reflections on Malbon's Mark," 165-171.

¹⁰Staley, The Print's First Kiss; Fowler, "Let the Reader Understand"; Wuellner, "Putting Life Back into the Lazarus Story and its Reading"; Botha, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.

¹¹Meyer, "The Challenges of Text and Reader to the Historical-Critical Method"; White, "Historical and Literary Criticism."

¹²The Bible and Culture Collective, The Postmodern Bible, 38-51.

¹³Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?," 278-283; and, more recently, see his "Reader-Response Criticism and New Testament Study," 94-102. Cf. Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 5-6; Staley, The Print's First Kiss, 27-49; Moloney, Belief in the Word, 5-6, 9-13; and Botha, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, 188-200.

¹⁴Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 1985; published in the SBL Dissertation Series in 1988.

readers. Along the way, more and more weight is being given to the "real reader"--either the elite, professionally trained, late twentieth-century Western (male) reader, or the feminist reader, or the third-world, postcolonial reader. From this more recent perspective, those earlier appropriations of reader criticism in biblical studies have been criticized for the same reasons that they had been criticized in literary critical circles: for not really being reader-centered at all, but for being just as text-centered as was New Criticism.¹⁵ Even in those places where the early biblical reader-response critics did talk of "readers" and the rhetorical responses that a narrative seeks to elicit from its "readers," what they were really talking about was merely their own idiosyncratic critical moves, lightly masked behind the neologisms and technical language of rhetoric and narratology. It is out of this subjectivist/essentialist scholarly debate in literary theory and biblical studies that the present project was conceived.

Recent Reader Criticism in the Fourth Gospel

R. A. Culpepper's Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, published in 1983, established the foundations for subsequent formalist, intrinsic descriptions of readers in the gospel of John. For over ten years now his book has set the parameters of narratological discussions in the Fourth Gospel. The difficulties Culpepper faced in tackling the issues of implied readers, narratees, and real readers have been reflected in almost all of the critical discussions of Johannine readers since then.¹⁶ And although a growing number of articles and books continue to use his formalist analysis of the Fourth Gospel as the foundation for their own exegetical studies, in the brief summaries below I want to focus only upon those subsequent works which try to illuminate the temporal aspect of narrative and attempt to describe the effect of that temporality upon the formation of readerly convictions and expectations. The wider range of articles, monographs, and commentaries which selectively utilize elements of formalist literary criticism without giving attention to rhetorical effect, although numerous and insightful, are beyond the scope of my particular interests and project.

Adele Reinhartz, Mark Stibbe, Lyle Eslinger, Barry Henaut, Willi Braun, and Robert Kysar have each written essays representative of reader-response concerns in the Fourth Gospel. Reinhartz's and Stibbe's studies are the broadest. For example, Reinhartz seeks to show that the pattern of "suggestion, negative response, and positive action" proposed by Charles Gibling is not only exhibited in the microstructure of Johannine signs, as Gibling once suggested, but is also reflected in the macrostructure of the book's

¹⁵As Mary Louise Pratt notes, although "reader-response criticism often presents itself as a corrective to formalist or intrinsic criticism[, t]his explanation . . . does not seem altogether adequate. On the one hand, formalism and New Criticism are already so discredited in theoretical circles that there seems little need for another round of abuse. On the other hand, much reader-response criticism turns out to be a notational variant of that very formalism so roundly rejected. An antiformalist theoretical stance invoked to uphold a neo- or covertly formalist practice is a contradiction not altogether unfamiliar these days, and one which suggests that in addition to the dead horses being flogged, there must be some live ones running around escaping notice. Gazes must turn outward, beyond the corral" ("Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations," 26; cf. Spivak, The Post-Colonial Critic, 50-52; The Bible and Culture Collective, The Postmodern Bible, 51-67).

¹⁶Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 206-227; cf. Staley, The Print's First Kiss, 11-15.

Christological purpose.¹⁷ In a careful analysis of the Johannine dialogues, monologues, and passion narrative, Reinhartz then shows how the narrative leads the reader through progressive steps of faith by "articulating or implying Christological expectations . . . then frustrating or negating these expectations . . . [before finally] reinstating and modifying the expectations. . . ." ¹⁸

Stibbe, in his most recent book, applies a number of different literary theories to the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. He begins with a chapter devoted to a reader-response description of the story's "hero," and like Reinhartz, he focuses on the implications of reader-response criticism for analyzing the Fourth Gospel's Christology. Stibbe's purpose is to show how reader-response criticism helps elucidate the elusive character of Jesus' presence in the story.¹⁹ Using an image from one of his favorite childhood books, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Stibbe argues that Jesus acts as a "heavenly pimpernel" who "will not be manipulated or controlled by the political or the ecclesiastical authorities of this world."²⁰ Like the pimpernel of Baroness Orczy's novel, the Fourth Gospel's "Jesus is a hero who cannot trust those around him."²¹ The elusive character of Jesus thus "acts as a source of hermeneutical seduction, tantalizing and drawing the reader back to the story in order to 'seek' the hero once again."²² Like the characters in the story who persevere in their search for Jesus and are rewarded with eternal life, persevering readers will also find their lives grounded in a Jesus who is "*absconditus atque praesans* (hidden but at the same time present)."²³

In contrast to Reinhartz and Stibbe, the remaining four scholars all focus on smaller segments of the Johannine text. Eslinger analyzes the Samaritan woman pericope, concentrating on the intertextual reading context of ancient Hebrew betrothal scenes at wells.²⁴ Henaut explores the narrative "disjunctions" in the healing of the royal official's son (4:43-54);²⁵ Kysar investigates the impact upon the implied reader of the four successive "human images" of John 10:1-18;²⁶ and Baun's attention is directed toward the book's double ending (20:30-31; 21:1-25).²⁷ In each instance, the impact of reader-response criticism is obvious. For example, although Eslinger is not particularly sensitive to the ways in which breaks in the Samaritan dialogue have an impact on reader expectations,²⁸ he does conclude his exegesis with the observation that the betrothal type-

¹⁷"Great Expectations," 63; cf. Giblin, "Suggestion, Negative Response, and Positive Action in St. John's Portrayal of Jesus (John 2.1-11.; 4.46-54.; 7.2-14.; 11.1-44)."

¹⁸"Great Expectations," 66. In her more recent work, *The Word in the World*, Reinhartz devotes an entire chapter to the Johannine implied reader (29-47). But apart from briefly mentioning the inherent value of sequential readings of the gospel (12-13), the explication of narrative temporality has little impact upon her analysis of the text.

¹⁹*John's Gospel*, 5-31.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 14; cf. 6, 23, 31.

²¹*Ibid.*, 19.

²²*Ibid.*, 31.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴"The Wooing of the Woman at the Well," 168-171.

²⁵"John 4:43-54 and the Ambivalent Narrator," 289-291, 293.

²⁶"Johannine Metaphor--Meaning and Function," 92, 94-96, 101-102.

²⁷"Resisting John," 66-71.

²⁸Eslinger's "reader" is noticeably missing from three pages of his exegesis ("The Wooing of the Woman at

scene of John 4 is a "strategy designed to mislead the reader so that he may gain an actual experience of the gap between Jesus and his human auditors. . . ." ²⁹

Barry Henaut, on the other hand, picks out the assumed redactional interstices in John 4:43-54 and argues that, in the way that "so-called traditional scholars" have analyzed the Johannine redactor's use of the signs source, they "have often intuitively made use of 'reader response criticism' without naming it as such." ³⁰ For Henaut, redaction critics' identification of editorial seams in the signs source help point out to the narrative critic that the Johannine narrator is not only reliable and omniscient, as Culpepper has argued, but at times can also be ambivalent and indecisive, "if not 'downright sneaky.'" ³¹

In a similar vein, Braun focuses on the classic redaction-critical issue of Johannine endings. Whereas I criticized Culpepper for failing to hold fast to his narratological category of narrator when discussing the problem of Johannine endings and for resorting too quickly to a redactional-critical solution, ³² Braun takes a different approach. Starting with insights drawn from the resistant stance of much of feminist reader criticism, Braun argues that the person who originally added John 21 was essentially a resistant reader; one who "not only disrupt[ed] the narrative design of the gospel but also diffuse[d] its affective power. John 21, the continuation of a previously closed work, thus constitutes the gospel's permission [I would say instead, a community's permission] for the reader to question the sufficiency of its claims concerning 'the truth' and to expose the dark underside of its justly celebrated and eloquent appeal to love." ³³ For Braun, then, the shaky foundations of Johannine redaction criticism are transformed into the solid ground of a resistant reception history.

Of these six examples of reader-oriented criticism, Kysar's exploration of Johannine metaphor in John 10:1-18 is the most explicit in its attempt to account for the successive judgments that the implied reader must make when confronted with multiple metaphors. Kysar writes of the tension that "exists between the implied reader's astonishment at the series of metaphors, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, her or his pleasure in not entirely sharing the lack of understanding characteristic of the hearers. . . ." ³⁴ His reader is one who "thinks she or he understands . . . but then . . . is left behind, struggling to keep up with the temporal flow of the discourse"; ³⁵ one who can be "put off guard by the images and urged on by them toward clarification." ³⁶ Kysar's exegetical program is thus strongly motivated by a desire to account for both the affective experience of reading as well as the cognitive, and to relate both experiences to the

the Well," 177-179).

²⁹Ibid., 180.

³⁰"John 4:43-54 and the Ambivalent Narrator," 304.

³¹Ibid., 300.

³²Staley, *The Print's First Kiss*, 39-41, 111-112; Henaut, "John 4:43-54 and the Ambivalent Narrator," 304; cf. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 43-48.

³³"Resisting John," 60, 71; cf. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 166. Curiously, Braun never explicitly calls his "ambivalent redactor" a resistant reader. That is my characterization of his position.

³⁴"Johannine Metaphor--Meaning and Function," 94.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 95.

reader's pilgrimage as she or he attempts to attend faithfully to the narrator's goals.³⁷

As with Reinhartz and Stibbe, these four scholars are attentive to the ancient cultural cues, both intertextual and intratextual, which evoke particular readerly expectations and provoke reevaluations of those expectations through surprising twists and turns in the subsequent narrative. Furthermore, all six writers connect these sequences of expectations with the (implied) author's or a later redactor's theological purpose. Finally, all six of these short studies strongly emphasize the unity of the text³⁸ along with the text's equally strong encoded reader--a reader whom the rhetorically sensitized critic can reconstruct apart from the disconcerting effects of the critic's own social location, personal prejudice, or idiosyncracies.³⁹

Recently two book-length studies of Johannine narrative have been written with sensitivity to a reader-response perspective.⁴⁰ In 1993 the Australian Johannine scholar Francis Moloney published the first volume of a commentary on the Fourth Gospel which ostensibly combines reader-response criticism with formalist narrative analysis. At this point Moloney's work covers only John 1-4, but even so, it is already explicit in its positive appraisal of a more formalist, "first-time reader" form of reader criticism. Moloney argues, for instance, that "the implied reader in a narrative is always communicating with the real reader of the narrative, *as the narrative unfolds*" (Moloney's emphasis) and consequently he is interested in the reader "in front of the text."⁴¹ But very quickly Moloney cautions that "[g]ospel criticism must not abandon the pursuits of historical-critical scholarship, which has devoted great attention to the rediscovery of the experience of the Johannine community."⁴²

From a reader-response perspective, Moloney is most helpful when summarizing how large narrative segments are arranged to form particular faith responses.⁴³ Moloney's reader is revealed to be a masterful learner, one who on rare occasions might be tempted, tested, or perturbed by the text,⁴⁴ but is never misled by it. His reader thus is always clear-sighted and, strangely, is never caught up by possible ambiguities in the text--even when the commentators quoted by Moloney noticeably have been.⁴⁵ Despite his emphasis on the temporal development of the reader's understanding of faith, Moloney offers only

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Braun, I think, would want to describe this narrative unity only in terms of the original gospel, excluding the disruptive second ending of Jn 21 ("Resisting John," 68, 70).

³⁹Schuyler Brown's 1989 article entitled "John and the Resistant Reader," is the rare exception to this. It represents one New Testament scholar's attempt to reflect upon the ethical implications of reading the Fourth Gospel in a post-Nicean, post-Holocaust world. However, the exegesis of specific Johannine texts plays a relatively minor role in the essay (257-258).

⁴⁰Margaret Davies' work, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, also deserves mentioning, since she begins by saying that her investigation takes up "the most valuable insights of structuralism and reader-response criticism" (7). However, her concluding chapter, entitled "The Implied Reader or Listener," is primarily an attempt to determine who were the text's "original readers, [as] implied by the strategic rhetoric of the Gospel" (362). For Davies, reader-response criticism is a tool to be used primarily for solving historical-critical questions.

⁴¹*Belief in the Word*, 13.

⁴²Ibid., cf. xi.

⁴³Note especially his "Conclusions" (51-52, 76, 91-92, 130-131, 175, 191-194).

⁴⁴Ibid., 52, 92, 130-131, 192, 199.

⁴⁵Ibid., 8-9, 13, 82-83, 135-137.

limited explication of how Johannine narrative manipulates the implied reader in any word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase sequences. Instead, when Moloney slows down to analyze minute segments of Johannine narrative, the more traditional categories of historical-critical research noticeably obtrude into his commentary. This strategy allows him to ignore the most challenging aspect of formalist reader-response criticism: the attempt to explore, in a freeze-frame manner, the meaning effects of narrative temporality.⁴⁶

In another recent and significant reader-oriented work, the South African scholar J. Eugene Botha has analyzed a smaller portion of the Fourth Gospel. Using speech act theory as his entry into an exhaustive description of Johannine style, Botha's revised 1990 dissertation is more sensitive to the successive interpretive moves which the text elicits from the reader than is Moloney's commentary, and thus Botha's work is more open to the gospel's wide-ranging rhetorical repertoire. Botha has chosen speech act theory for its ability to enunciate carefully the distinctions between various types of affective intentions, and this methodology exposes hitherto unseen levels of persuasiveness in Johannine style. For example, Botha's precise and exhaustive classification of linguistic segments in John 4:1-42 according to speech act categories reveals to the critic how Johannine narrative utterances "'involv[e] readers', 'enhanc[e] *attentio*', [thus] 'ensuring reader participation.'"⁴⁷ Botha's analysis uncovers a reader who, with regard to the outcome of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, is kept in suspense through the evocation of the betrothal type-scene; a reader who is "involuntarily involved in the narrative by devices such as irony and misunderstanding."⁴⁸ Narrative gaps are exposed and measured for depth and circumference. But beyond these evocative elements of Johannine style, Botha argues that speech act analysis shows how the narrative actually forces its readers "into involuntary association and disassociation with certain characters,"⁴⁹ thus trapping the reader. For Botha, all these strategies work together successfully to achieve the communicative goals of the implied author.⁵⁰ Without exception, each narrative speech act in John 4:1-42 leaves its christological, socio-political, or religious imprint upon the implied reader.

The Critique of New Testament Reader-Response Criticism

To some scholars, the turn toward synchronic, reader-oriented analyses of New Testament narratives appears to be a radical reaction to problems left in the wake of historical-critical methodology. Yet biblical reader-response criticism has generated a

⁴⁶For example, when Moloney discusses the well-known contradiction between Jn 3:22, 26 and 4:1-2, he fails to address the question of what effect the contradiction might have upon the reader's sense of trust and understanding (ibid., 135-137). Even more telling is the fact that Moloney entirely omits from his discussion my analysis of this text. No doubt this is because I described the function of 4:1-3 in terms of a "victimizing strategy," a strategy that Moloney finds "unacceptable" (*Belief in the Word*, 82, n. 21; but see 229 for many other references to my work; cf. *The Print's First Kiss*, 96-98; see also Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 98-107).

⁴⁷*Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*, 190.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., 191; cf. 115-121.

⁵⁰Ibid., 189.

number of challenging responses even from scholars who, like themselves, are disenchanted with historical-critical methods.⁵¹ One of the most pervasive criticisms leveled against biblical reader-response criticism comes from feminist and liberationist interpreters. These interpreters are quick to point out that the critic's social location has generally not been taken into account by the largely white, elite males doing the readerly analysis.⁵² In our quest to be part of the biblical critical guild, we reader critics have sacrificed one of the truly original insights of reader-response criticism (that is, what real readers bring to the reading of texts)⁵³ for "scientific" (read formalist), exegetical objectivity.⁵⁴ From this critical perspective, the technical expressions of the reader as "in the text" as an "implied reader," or as an "encoded reader," are merely phrases which, once demythologized, betray the individual interpreter's unfocused ideological and political interests. These "readers" are not objective elements of texts at all. Instead, they are rhetorical devices naively used by the interpreter to convince an elite reading audience of the validity of the particular interpretation.⁵⁵

So Temma Berg can write that, in general, biblical reader-response criticism needs to keep looking at the words 'reader' and 'text' and 'in' and re-examine what they mean. . . . The reader is in and not in the text. The reader can never be separated from the texts that surround him, partly because 'reader' and 'text' are interchangeable signs, but also because the reader is an active producer of what she reads. The text exists so that the reader may fill it. The reader exists so that the text may fill her. Neither the reader nor the text has a single, stable center; both the reader and the text may be endlessly changed.⁵⁶

Mary Ann Tolbert's criticism of my work sounds a similar refrain, and can be addressed just as easily to the seven studies that I have summarized above. "What Staley's generalized reader masks," she writes, ". . . is the critic himself: Staley's reader reads the way Staley does. His analysis . . . is not the reading experience of any reader, but the analysis of the modern biblical critic."⁵⁷ Here Tolbert is echoing an argument made by

⁵¹Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*, 115; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 91-101; Wuellner, "Is There an Encoded Reader Fallacy?," 41; Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?," 283-290; Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 98-107.

⁵²Anderson, "Matthew: Gender and Reading," 3-5, 21-24; Burnett, "Reflections on Keeping the Implied Author an 'It,'" 14; Wuellner, "Is There an Encoded Reader Fallacy?," 49; Berg, "Reading in/to Mark," 196; Tolbert, "A Response from a Literary Perspective," 208-209; Durber, "The Female Reader of the Parable of the Lost," 59-69; Segovia, "And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues," 18-20, 28-29. In the secular realm, see Schweickart, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," 35-39; and Pratt, "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations," 26-30.

⁵³Berg, "Reading in/to Mark," 202-203; Segovia, "The Final Farewell of Jesus," 168-169; Beutler, "Response from a European Perspective," 195-196; Tolbert, "A Response from a Literary Perspective," 208-209; The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, 54, 175-176.

⁵⁴Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 106-107, 177-178.

⁵⁵Wuellner, "Is There an Encoded Reader Fallacy?"; Boyarin, "The Politics of Biblical Narratology"; cf. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible*, 14-19, 161-162.

⁵⁶Berg, "Reading in/to Mark," 202; see also Phillips, "What is Written? How Are You Reading?' Gospel, Intertextuality and Doing Lukewise," 277 n. 30.

⁵⁷Tolbert, "A Response from a Literary Perspective," 206.

Stephen Moore, an argument which was first put forward by Stanley Fish in a critique of his own early "affective stylistics."⁵⁸ Moore's poststructuralist evaluation of reader-response criticism in New Testament studies concluded:

Reader-response criticism of the Gospels, because it is an enterprise that tends to feel accountable to conventional gospel scholarship, has worked with reader constructs that are sensitively attuned to what may pass as permissible critical reading. That is why reader-oriented exegeses can often read disappointingly like the familiar critical renditions of the given biblical passage, lightly reclothed in a reader vocabulary. The reader of audience-oriented gospel criticism is a repressed reader. Its parents are mainstream gospel exegesis on the biblical side, and reader in the text formalism on the nonbiblical side.⁵⁹

The signs are clear and unambiguous: Warning: Reading in Process. Wash your hands, disinfect your clothing, and check your personal effects at the door.

But on the other side of the critical debate, opposite Tolbert and Moore, stands the social world perspective of Bruce Malina. Although he can agree with Tolbert that it is salutary to force reader-response critics and readers out from behind their individualistic and anachronistic reading masks, Malina has problems with the "increasingly diverse world of New Testament interpretation," which Tolbert and Moore laud. From Malina's point of view, the high value Tolbert and Moore place on pluralistic and individualistic readings is just another sign of ethnocentric, elitist, middle-class American values being forced upon a radically different, ancient Mediterranean world.⁶⁰

Malina's empirically defined, cultural-anthropological model of reading is one in which contemporary, considerate readers who value "U.S. fairness"⁶¹ will "obviously make the effort to bring to their reading a set of scenarios proper to the time, place and culture of the biblical author."⁶² From Malina's perspective, reading models that fail to make this effort are sinfully anachronistic, ethnocentric,⁶³ elitist, and grossly inconsiderate.⁶⁴ Strangely, the fairness doctrine to which he appeals seems to get lost in the agonistic rhetoric directed particularly at poststructuralist and other postmodern readings.

In spite of the many important hermeneutical issues that separate social world critics like Malina from reader-response critics like myself, and from poststructuralist

⁵⁸Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 134-136; Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 21-67, 147-173; cf. Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism*, 79-83; and Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?," 285-286.

⁵⁹*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 107.

⁶⁰Malina, "Reading Theory Perspective," 18-19, 21.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 22. Cf. Moore's evaluation of North American capitalist economy and its influence upon biblical exegesis (*Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, 148-149).

⁶²Malina, "Reading Theory Perspectives," 16.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 17. Compare this with Edgar McKnight's comment: "A reader-oriented approach acknowledges that the contemporary reader's 'intending' of the text is not the same as that of the ancient author and/or the ancient readers. This is not possible, necessary, or desirable" (*Post-Modern Use of the Bible*, 150, see also 151-154; cf. Moore's discussion of intentionality, in *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, 61-62, 74-75).

critics like Moore, we all nevertheless share a common rhetorical purpose: to radically undercut the churchly ordinariness of the text--that presumed connectedness of the biblical world with our own religious subculture--in order to confront the New Testament as other, as an alien thing.⁶⁵ The social world critics, for their part, do this by setting the biblical text in an ancient Mediterranean social context with a nearly unbridgeable chasm between it and our own world.⁶⁶ They may provide contemporary readers with a critical drop of water to cool their tongues, but that cultural chasm is one which only their own prophets can cross with ease. Conversely, some reader-response critics--particularly poststructuralist critics--undercut the ordinariness of the biblical text by jarringly juxtaposing it to an ever-widening collection of contemporary literary theorists and intertextual reading frames.⁶⁷

But let me give a different illustration of this rhetorical phenomenon from a related field: that of contemporary historical Jesus research. I find it not at all surprising that the Robert W. Funk-inspired Jesus Seminar has recently, in the final decade before the end of the second millennium, "discovered" that the historical Jesus was a profoundly prophetic, non-apocalyptic figure trying to transform and revitalize Judaism.⁶⁸ This peculiarly Lukan-sounding Jesus speaks out against the popular television-evangelist mode of Christianity which is saturated by a gross apocalypticism; a mode of Christianity which is largely uninterested in caring for or protecting the present world and its people.

But compare this latter-day reconstruction with Albert Schweitzer's turn-of-the-century work on the historical Jesus. Surrounded by a popular Christian culture that believed the twentieth century would herald the inbreaking of God's kingdom through the cooperative, humanizing agendas of church and state, Schweitzer's historical research uncovered a radically apocalyptic "Markan Jesus;" a different Jesus whose cataclysmic metaphors opposed the idealistic *Zeitgeist* of Schweitzer's day. Although Schweitzer's research and the Jesus Seminar's research reconstruct the teaching of the historical Jesus along totally different lines (the former accepts Jesus' apocalyptic words as authentic, the latter rejects them as secondary), both share a common but unspoken rhetorical aim: to make Jesus different from their own culture so that "he" can critically speak to it.⁶⁹

I believe that this same phenomenon can be found in the social world gospels and in the reader-response and poststructuralist gospels. Although their methodologies differ radically, their goals (conscious or unconscious) are similar: to defamiliarize the gospel narratives to such an extent that they can speak to contemporary culture in fresh ways.⁷⁰ Or perhaps their goals might better be described negatively: all three critical approaches, paralleling historical Jesus research, attempt to defamiliarize the gospel so that it is no

⁶⁵Osiek, "The Social Science and the Second Testament," 94.

⁶⁶Among the social world critics there is a widespread emphasis upon the ancient Mediterranean "honor/shame culture" with its "dyadic view of person" and "limited good," which diverges widely from Euroamerican values (Malina, *The New Testament World*, 25-93).

⁶⁷Fowler, "Let the Reader Understand", 228-266; Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, xv-xix; cf. Culbertson, *The Poetics of Revelation*, 141-185.

⁶⁸For example, see Marcus Borg's *Jesus*, 14, 125-171, and his more recent article, "Portraits of Jesus in Contemporary North American Scholarship."

⁶⁹Not surprisingly, McKnight makes the same observation when speaking about scholars' reconstructions of "Paul" (*Post-Modern Use of the Bible*, 148-150).

⁷⁰White, "Historical and Literary Criticism," 32-34.

longer able to speak in the traditional ways of the past.

Even the great contemporary Jesus scholar, John D. Crossan, is quick to point out (as was Schweitzer before him) that researchers' reconstructions of the historical Jesus have always had a strangely autobiographical element to them (that is, of course, all reconstructions except his own).⁷¹ In other words, the interests and ideologies of the scholars doing the research are always replicated in their portraits of Jesus. I suspect that the same autobiographical point could also be made of biblical literary critics and their historical-critical counterparts. Indeed, it is precisely this autobiographical element that Tolbert's and Moore's criticisms attempt to uncover in us, the reader critics. Thankfully, however, they stop well short of disrobing their fellow scholars or themselves.

In summary, those who challenge reader-response criticism's appropriation by biblical scholars focus on two fundamental issues. The first criticism focuses on reader-response criticism's lack of critical apparatus for analyzing its own interpretive stance. Reader-response criticism often fails or refuses to investigate the social and rhetorical contexts of the interpreter and the implications of those contexts for interpretation. Thus, its interpretations lack a critically-reflected subjectivity--in spite of the fact that its interpretations are covertly rooted in the critic's experience as much as liberationist and feminist exegesis are explicitly rooted in the experience of oppression. Although reader-response criticism's failure or refusal to address the social and rhetorical contexts of the biblical interpreter may be due as much to academic or ecclesial politics as to any theoretical oversight, nevertheless more openness in this area is necessary if it is ever going to strengthen its position within the guild. The second criticism focuses on reader-response criticism's interest in appropriating the Bible for the contemporary reader. From this angle, reader-response criticism seems blatantly unconcerned about how canonical texts might have been understood and considered persuasive by first-century audiences.⁷²

Thus, biblical reader-response critics fail at both ends of the reader spectrum. For historical and social world critics, reader-response criticism as it is applied to the Bible fails to understand the ancient Mediterranean world or its values--or, worse yet, it has no interest in understanding them. Reader-response criticism is blatantly, pointedly anachronistic. And for feminist and liberationist critics, reader-response criticism fails to account for its own values and advocacy stance. Reader-response criticism is blithely elitist and anarchistic.

Hobbling out of the Tomb

Although my particular project addresses the two criticisms mentioned above, it does so within the context of reader-response exegetical studies in the Fourth Gospel. My purpose is therefore not primarily adversarial or theoretical, but is instead exegetical, hermeneutical, and self-reflective. I am interested in the application of reader-response

⁷¹Crossan writes, "historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography" (*The Historical Jesus*, xxviii; cf. xxxiv). However, his methodologies and reconstructions are somehow free from these two viruses that inflict every other portrayal of Jesus (*ibid.*).

⁷²This point is often made in spite of many reader-response critics' expressed interest in orality (see particularly, Fowler, "*Let the Reader Understand*", 48-52; and Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 84-92).

criticism to the biblical text, in its appropriateness for and appropriation in contemporary Christian communities, and in my own existential relationship to the approach and the text, more than I am interested in literary theory *qua* theory. Indeed, the three chapters that make up Part One of this book began simply as exegetical studies, with little in the way of explicit theoretical underpinnings. For example, my dissertation's textually defined implied reader is the theoretical starting place for Chapter One (a dynamic reading of character in Jn 5 and 9), and, to a lesser extent, for Chapters Two and Three (an analysis of Jn 11 from the perspective of a resistant reader, and an analysis of the text-critical problem in Jn 18:12-24 from the perspective of reception theory). And although in Part One I make a number of references to my earlier, more formalist study of Johannine narrative, this book is intended to be neither a survey of nor an introduction to the varieties of reader criticism--formalist, feminist, receptionist, or postmodern. Many such introductions are already in print and need not be replicated here. Rather, my project begins where most other reader-response critical studies tend to end: with a formalist, reader-response exegetical study of the "encoded reader." Then in Part Two, I explore the implications of my own personal history for my interpretation of Johannine texts.

Borrowing from Stephen Moore's brief definition of formalism as "a methodological attitude in which the meaning of a literary work is located in the details of its structure,"⁷³ I begin by imagining the reader of John 5 and 9 as a rhetorically-defined structure in the text: that is, as an implied or encoded reader. From this formalist, rhetorical model of reading, I then move on in the next two chapters to explore two more active reading strategies. First, taking a cue from feminist literary theory, I investigate the possibilities of a resistant reading of John 11. Next I use the text-critical problem of John 18:12-24 as empirical evidence of early Christian reading responses and as a window into an agonistic reception history.

As the "real reader" becomes more rhetorically overt in these exegetical chapters, the interpretive value of what actual readers bring to the reading experience begins to take on new significance for me. Consequently, the second half of the book examines the role of the real reader: It addresses the question of the contemporary reader's social location and the implications of that location for reading the Fourth Gospel. In this half of the book I use recent attempts of three Euroamerican biblical scholars to situate themselves ideologically and sociologically as real readers, to establish the context for Chapter Four, the book's key theoretical chapter: an analysis of autobiography in contemporary literary theory and its hitherto unexplored implications for reconceiving biblical reader-response criticism.

Whatever overarching thesis this book may have (and I am not convinced that it does have one), I suppose that its origins can be traced to the autobiographical emphasis of Part Two, which is rooted in Mary Ann Tolbert's critical remark quoted earlier: "Staley's generalized reader masks . . . the critic himself: Staley's reader reads the way Staley does."⁷⁴ In many respects, this book is my attempt to discover the Staley who is the real reader behind the objectified, implied/encoded reader of my public scholarship. But

⁷³Literary Criticism and the Gospels, 180. See McKnight for an excellent historical survey of the formalist tradition in literary criticism (The Bible and the Reader, 15-82).

⁷⁴Tolbert, "A Response from a Literary Perspective," 206.

in this dis-covering process, I find that I disc over as much fertile soil as I dig up. In my search for a real reader beneath my Johannine implied/encoded reader, I find that I am continually recovering and reseeded in plots no less imaginatively-framed than those which I originally built for my Johannine implied/encoded reader. And it is precisely within these new-formed plots that the postmodern and postcolonial perspectives come to play.

Although it is not my purpose to explore all the nuances of postcolonialism and postmodernism any more than it is my purpose to summarize the varieties of reader-response criticism or autobiographics, some concise descriptions of these movements seem in order. Again, Moore's easily accessible definitions prove helpful. Drawing from a wide ranging collection of literary theorists, he describes postmodernism as a discontent within modernity and an incredulity toward its legitimizing 'metanarratives' [or its totalizing systems of thought]; . . . a 'criticism which would include in its own discourse an implicit (or explicit) reflection upon itself'; . . . 'a desire to think in terms sensitive to difference (of others without opposition, of heterogeneity without hierarchy. . .).'⁷⁵

Similarly, Arif Dirlik defines the goal of postcolonialism as the abolition of "all distinction between center and periphery as well as all other 'binarisms' that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) ways of thinking[, in order to] . . . reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency."⁷⁶

So to put the underlying issues of Part Two into the language of contemporary literary theory, in the second half of the book I address postmodernism's demolition of the residually Platonic unity of texts and selves (two significant modernist "metanarratives"), and I examine the implications of that demolition for a postcolonial reader-response criticism.⁷⁷ Not the least of these implications will be that any conscious turn toward exploring real readers' hermeneutics will be fraught with just as many epistemological difficulties and theoretical dead ends as were the discussions regarding the status of implied or encoded readers. That is to say, the critic's construction of himself or herself--or the construction of a particular reading community--as a heuristic, interpretive device will be no less fictive, no less rhetorically construed, and no less politically neutral than were the earlier and friendlier formalist readers.⁷⁸

On the heels of that last paragraph I have to step back to catch my breath. I feel more than a little uneasy about what I just finished saying, and I am not convinced that I

⁷⁵Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 181; see also Fowler, "Postmodern Biblical Criticism," 4-6; and Aichele, "On Postmodern Biblical Criticism and Exegesis," 31. Jane Flax helpfully lists eight beliefs "still prevalent in (especially American) culture but derived from the Enlightenment," which "postmodern philosophers seek to throw into radical doubt" ("Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," 624-625).

⁷⁶"The Postcolonial Aura," 329, cf. 332; cf. Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonialism?"; Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, 50-52.

⁷⁷The equally important theological connection between texts and selves is described nicely by Moore, who writes: "[T]he idea of a unified identity, corresponding to the idea of a unified text . . . , is a displaced theological idea descended from the ancient and medieval concept of the soul[; and] the opposite idea of a split or fragmented subject, corresponding to a fragmented text, is an idea no less theological ("Mirror, Mirror . . .," 169; cf. van den Heever, "Being and Nothingness," 42-44).

⁷⁸The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, 55-57.

headed off in the right direction. Perhaps I got carried away by my own rhetoric. So let me backtrack. In spite of what I just said in the preceding paragraph, a postmodern dismantling of texts into other texts, and readers into other readers, does not necessarily imply that I am denying the existence of an individual's or a society's historically- and culturally-mediated consciousness. Instinctively, I feel that I am more than this black ink on white paper; that Jesus is more than a stretch of four Hebrew letters among the thousands of possible consonant clusters posted under Roman directives; that the Holocaust is more than the four words *six million murdered Jews*. And here is where, to my way of thinking, the politics of postcolonialism and feminism often jostle uncomfortably with postmodernism's "rejection of a privileged position."⁷⁹

The physical concreteness of the recent past in postcolonial criticism (the memory of casually armed soldiers maintaining "order") and the hierarchical, binary ideologies accompanying postcolonialism ("you are subject to us," "it's us against you") are, at the very least, residual traces of "a privileged position" which still exerts its temporizing power on the borders of postmodernism's "desire to think in terms sensitive to difference (of others without opposition, of heterogeneity without hierarchy. . .)."⁸⁰ Just one example: Knowing that the director of the imaginative fantasy films *Jaws*, *E.T.*, and *Jurassic Park* also directed *Schindler's List*, a re-creation of the Holocaust in documentary-like black-and-white celluloid, in no way lessens that story's concreteness; nor does it neutralize the hierarchies and binary oppositions of Hitler's Third Reich. Moreover, viewing *Schindler's List* in the context of *Jaws*, *E.T.*, and *Jurassic Park* cannot merely textualize those living traces who, at the end of the film and in full living color, memorialized their rescuer, Oskar Schindler, by placing stones on his Jerusalem grave in 1993. Postmodernism can bask in the light of heterogeneity without hierarchy, but it is postcolonialism and feminism that refuse to trivialize or remain silent when confronted with the destructive residue of colonialist and modernist hierarchies and their binary oppositions.

So in spite of a certain tension between postmodernism's politics and the politics of feminism and postcolonialism,⁸¹ all three perspectives play important roles in the latter half of the book. First, these three critical perspectives bring important insights to bear on the theory of autobiography as it is discussed in the field of contemporary literary criticism. Feminism and postcolonialism have been instrumental in challenging and stretching the traditional boundaries of the genre, and postmodernist thought has placed a question mark over the Western understanding of the individual, unified self which had been central to earlier, formalist analyses of the autobiographical canon. Today, interest in autobiography is intense precisely because of the concerns that these three perspectives bring to the genre. So perhaps it is not surprising to find numerous echoes from them in my chapter on autobiography's status in contemporary literary theory.

Secondly, a postmodern sense of textual and readerly erosion leads me, in Chapter Five, to explore an autobiographical reading of myself reading the Fourth Gospel. This erosion provides the basis for a postcolonial reading of myself, which is spatialized

⁷⁹Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 153.

⁸⁰Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 181.

⁸¹For example, see the instructive discussion in The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, 234-267, esp., 262-266.

naturally in terms of my memories from a childhood spent on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. The eroding self stretches the boundaries of the autobiographical genre and weaves it intertextually with feminist criticism, myth, geography, genealogy, and popular American culture.

Thirdly, in Chapter Six, the postcolonial reading of myself leads into a postmodern, dramatic reading of the Johannine passion narrative. There, in a dialogue between the three corpses on their crosses (myself as social world critic, as literary critic, and as autobiographer), an eroding sense of self and text fight for interpretive control at the site of Jesus' crucifixion.

The book concludes with a brief look at Arnold Krupat's "ethnocriticism," with its commitment to "betweenness" and to dialogue on the epistemological frontier of "transculturalization."⁸² I try to imagine the implications of Krupat's vision for a biblical reader-response criticism that tries to account for the critic's social location.

Unbound

For the first seven years of my professional teaching career, I required freshmen students to write autobiographical letters describing a crisis event in their lives and then asked them to reflect on how that crisis affected their developing life story. I did not realize at the time that autobiography and autobiographical theory would one day undergird my own move toward postmodern and postcolonial biblical criticism. But now, nine years after initially assigning that exercise in an introductory theology course, I find myself turning to autobiography as I struggle with critical questions of reader-response criticism and biblical hermeneutics.

Speaking providentially as a sometimes-uncomfortable Presbyterian, I discovered when I was nearly finished with this project a just-published collection of essays edited by Diane Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Murphy Zauhar, entitled The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism. Not only did their book give me a name for the criticism I was attempting, it also confirmed my own intuitions. These scholars' attempts to integrate their own personal lives with textual analyses and then to validate them within the professional guild of literary criticism was a breath of fresh air in my musty smelling, wintry office. Their work gives me hope that spring will come. Perhaps one day all professional interpreters of texts will feel free to examine themselves in their critical enterprises without, at the same time, fearing that they may have contracted a deadly disease.⁸³

No doubt some will say that all my careful nuancing of postmodern, postcolonial, post-me-up positions is merely another contemporary example of the tail wagging the proverbial dog, a fragrant cloth disguising the stink of Lazarus' decaying flesh; that my final chapters are little more than temporary linguistic flight from the present realities of

⁸²Ethnocriticism, 28.

⁸³For example, see the recent work of Ched Myers and Wes Howard-Brook, who, as nonprofessional interpreters of the New Testament, explore their own socially and politically sensitive, self-conscious readings of Mark and John (Myers, Who Will Roll Away the Stone?; Howard-Brook, Becoming Children of God).

unemployment, uncertainty, and the malaise of middle-age.⁸⁴ Yet I cannot help but feel, deep inside (inside the tomb? the womb?), that the tale weighing me down is much larger than the original species of formalist criticism which dogged my original exegetical work in the gospel of John.

I concluded my first book with this question:

Can narrative criticism at last arouse Lazarus from the grave [I should have written "from the tome"], and still allow him to be Lazarus? The pressing issue before the biblical critic is whether reader response criticism can unwind those strands of time. Can embracing the medium of print awaken and rouse the text from its death-like slumber, or will the print's kiss sound the death knell? Only the reader can tell.⁸⁵

I think I am still asking those same questions or--perhaps--related questions: Can any form of reader-response criticism arouse Lazarus from that grave tome and still allow him to be Lazarus? Or perhaps I am now more concerned with Mary and Martha, the women; the sisters. After all, they are the ones still alive, the ones left behind who must struggle to make some sense out of the world. So let me try asking the question again: Can packaging the gospel in autobiographical literary criticism and imprinting it with postmodern and postcolonial postmarks send it off to new, unforeseen dustynations?⁸⁶ This reader, for one, can't tell for sure. Nevertheless, to adapt for biblical criticism what Patricia Williams once wrote about her own rhetorical aims in the legal profession, I have tried to write in such a way that my writing will reveal the intersubjectivity of my exegetical constructions and so lead "the reader both to participate in the construction of meaning and to be conscious of that process."⁸⁷ Like hers, my writing is an attempt "to

⁸⁴The psychologist Dan P. McAdams argues that at midlife, people like me quite often move toward "postformal modes of thinking" (*The Stories We Live By*, 200). This postformal mode of thinking "rejects the absolute truths of formal operations and focuses instead on situationally specific truths, on solutions and logical inferences that are linked to, and defined by, particular contexts. . . . We . . . struggle to formulate useful statements and viewpoints that are true for the time being and in a particular place. Our thinking about certain issues becomes more radically subjective. We come to accept 'local truths' rather than universal ones; we grow suspicious of general laws about domains of life that are now seen to have multiple and even contradictory meanings" (ibid; cf. James Fowler's description of "conjunctive faith[, which] involves going beyond the . . . clear boundaries of identity" [*Stages of Faith*, 183, 186-187]). Recently, Paul Anderson has put forward the intriguing thesis that the author of the Fourth Gospel himself evinces a "conjunctive faith" (*The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 147-151).

⁸⁵*The Print's First Kiss*, 122.

⁸⁶Where, perhaps, it could be used to fuel new fires.

⁸⁷*The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, 7-8; cf. Berg, "Suppressing the Language of (Wo)man," 10-14. But Steven Mailloux points out the "[p]roblems [which] may arise with such rhetorical self-consciousness" (*Rhetorical Power*, 167). For example, he sees three central difficulties, and all three are worth quoting in detail. They express my own fears as I attempt to become rhetorically self-conscious in my biblical criticism.

Mailloux argues: "One danger is that rhetorical candor will be read as narcissistic self-indulgence, that it will be seen not as a necessary theoretical move required by rhetorical theory but as another case of theory's fashionable rereading of itself--self-critique as self-display.

"A still greater danger for a rhetorical hermeneutics is that a demonstration of its rhetoricity will undermine its persuasiveness as theory. This is the rhetorician's nightmare: By arguing that there is no appeal outside rhetorical exchanges, have I undercut the rhetorical force of my own theory? Does rhetorical candor detract from rhetorical effectiveness?"

create a genre of [exegetical] writing to fill the gaps of traditional [biblical] scholarship."⁸⁸

Sometimes I wonder if the final chapters of this book haven't raised someone--or something--else, quite different from what I originally intended. Perhaps I should have just let sleeping dogs lie. Were there other bodies in Lazarus's tomb that hot Judean day? It was so dark, I couldn't see inside when I was reading the text. Perhaps there were scores of ossuaries I missed back there, "cases and bins and boxes,"⁸⁹ each set in its own niche, each filled with the dust and bones of much different memories; whose traces of stench still lingered imperceptibly in the corners of the hollowed-out hillside.

But then again, perhaps it is the voice that I should be concerned about--not the dead brother, not the still living sisters. The voice that gives a name to the stench and the decay and calls it forth.⁹⁰ Gospel.

["Finally,] . . . [o]ne other problem must also be faced head on. It is again the question of consequences, the consequences of rhetorical hermeneutics. Certain traditionalists in hermeneutics and conservatives in politics will worry about its purported relativism and anarchic nihilism, claiming that in such a theory anything goes and all is permitted. Some radical revisionists may accuse this same theory of liberal pluralism and political quietism, not because 'anything goes' but because 'everything stays' in such theories; nothing is changed because all is (supposedly) tolerated" (ibid., 167-168; cf. Jasper, Rhetoric, Power and Community, 69).

⁸⁸Williams, The Alchemy of Race and Rights, 7; see also Miller, Getting Personal, xi.

⁸⁹Hillerman, Talking God, 291.

⁹⁰In the words of Nicole Jouve, "writing criticism as autobiography may be the way to a fuller, more relevant voice" (White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue, 11; cf. Young-Bruehl, "Pride and Prejudice," 15-18).